DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 401 760 FL 024 257

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TITLE ESL and Parental Empowerment.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 20p.; For complete volume, see FL 024 252.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Working Papers in Educational Linguistics; v12 n1 p75-93 Spr 1996

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; Adult Education; Applied Linguistics; *English (Second Language); Immigrants; Language Research; Language Role; *Linguistic Theory; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Empowerment; Parent Participation; *Parent Role; Refugees; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning
IDENTIFIERS *Southeast Asians

ABSTRACT

A study conducted in the English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) class of 11 Southeast Asian refugee parents of several nationalities and language groups investigated changes in the parents' relationships with their children through four months of the acculturation process, focusing on the strategies the parents used to guide and assist their children in school. Data were gathered through observation of discussion groups and classes. Differences in the cultures, particularly relating to perceptions of education and the family, were taken into consideration. It was found that the parents felt their children did not listen to parents and did not take school seriously; this was noted particularly in teenagers. They also felt the children were using their greater knowledge of American culture to evade academic activities. Parents observed changes in their children's behavior since immigration, including loss of respect for parents and discipline difficulties. Role reversal was sometimes observed. Parents evidenced both empathy and frustration in dealing with their children's education and used a number of strategies to encourage attention to academic achievement. The ESL class provided a forum for discussing these issues and enhance communication capacity. Contains 24 references. (MSE)

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ESL and Parental Empowerment

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The impact of acculturation on immigrant and refugee families and on children's education has concerned many researchers. Some (Weinstein-Shr 1994; Smith-Hefner 1990) have examined literacy and educational achievement within the framework of the family and its pattern of acculturation. This research, conducted in an ESL class of Southeast Asian refugee parents, builds on this work, providing a description of the changes in parents' relationship to their children throughout the process of acculturation, focusing on the strategies these parents use to guide and assist their children in school. Finally, this paper draws implications regarding how the ESL class functions to empower parents in their interactions with their children's schools.

The impact of acculturation on families and its subsequent impact on the educational processes of children of immigrants and refugees is of concern to both educators and researchers. Within the growing literature on the impact of migration on Southeast Asian refugee families, some researchers (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore 1985, 1989, 1991) have highlighted children's academic success against seemingly impossible odds. This research along with media stereotypes which have cast Asians as the "model minority" risks providing a collective image of all Asian groups as successfully acculturating to life in the U.S., with academically successful children who are achieving the immigrant American dream. This image, beyond being inaccurate, blurs crucial distinctions between Asians with very different immigrant/refugee status, class background, education level, and attitude toward U.S. culture. Lee (1994) and Nash (1991) indicate the problems involved when educators believe the model minority stereotype, have higher expectations of Asian students and may not, therefore, give adequate attention to academic or social problems among Asian students.

Within the Southeast Asian community, research (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore 1991) highlighting children's remarkable academic success was conducted on refugees from the first and second waves of immigration during the 1970s, a group of refugees who were of middle class backgrounds, often had had some exposure to Western cultural values, and received sponsorship through churches and individuals in the U.S. (Lucas

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1993). Research on the third wave of immigration, between 1980 and 1987, focuses on the largest wave of immigration and families from the poorest socioeconomic classes and mainly rural areas (Kelly 1986 as cited in Smith-Hefner 1990). This research tells of a much more complex and varied pattern of academic achievement and indicates the importance of understanding Southeast Asian refugees as different in terms of class and cultural background and time of arrival.

Peters' (1988) study of Southeast Asian youths in Philadelphia determined that Khmer and Lao parents come from the most rural background of the Southeast Asian refugees, and therefore have the least familiarity with Western culture, the lowest levels of education, and the most difficulty guiding their children through the American school system. A number of researchers (Baizerman, Hendricks 1988; Rumbaut, Ima 1988; Peters 1988; Lucas 1993; Welartna 1993) have indicated that Khmer families have experienced the greatest trauma due to the war and the following reign of Pol Pot. This has caused the highest incidence of post-traumatic stress disorders, affecting the education of both parents and children. Also, during the reign of Pol Pot, schools were banned and many teachers were executed or survived by masking their education and profession (Lucas 1993). Clearly, this has had a severe impact on the literacy and educational level of Khmer parents and children.

Rumbaut and Ima (1988) attest that Lao teens have the lowest GPA of all the Southeast Asian refugee groups. Studies of Lao teens in two different U.S. cities (Baizerman, Hendricks 1988; Peters 1988) indicate that they adopt a style of dress and speech which asserts their identity as different from their parents' and from a mainstream U.S. cultural orientation. Similar to Lee's (1994) finding regarding Southeast Asian students in a Philadelphia high school who identify as "new wavers", this group resisted parental authority and behaviors which encouraged academic achievement, indexing themselves as different from other Asian students and "more American... more cool." (Lee 1994: 423)

Some researchers have explored issues of acculturation of youths and their parents and the changing family structure in an attempt to explain varying levels of children's academic achievement. In particular, researchers (Buijs 1993; Trueba, Jacobs, Kirton 1990: Weinstein-Shr 1995) maintain that because children acculturate and learn the second language much more quickly than their parents, the generation gap between parents and children is complicated by cultural and linguistic gaps. Trueba, Jacobs, and Kirton (1990:67) indicate that while children often desire to assimilate and are embarrassed about parents' "old ways", parents fear children's loss of L1 and cultural values. In addition, roles of parent and child may become reversed as children often become the main translator (of both language and culture) for parents. This pattern is particularly problematic in Lao and Khmer families which retain traditional roles in which parents are the authority figures (Lucas 1993). Weinstein-Shr's (1994) research with fami-

lies in a Cambodian community in Western Massachusetts focuses on the negotiation of power as a crucial issue for parents in their changing roles in the U.S. Children's role as translator results in parents' reliance on children to decipher communication from the school. She also discusses parents' frustration at not being able to help children with homework and their fear of "looking stupid" in front of their children.

Parents' educational background, as well as cultural values, have an impact on parent involvement in their children's schooling. Smith-Hefner (1990) indicates that many Boston area teachers complain that Khmer parents are not involved in their children's education and do not attend parent-teacher conferences. She notes that communication between parents and non-Khmer educators is complicated by linguistic barriers and by parents' reluctance to question teachers' practices. This can be explained by the fact that in both Cambodia and Laos, the school is in complete control of a child's education. Parents do not question the teacher's methods, the curriculum, or school policies (Lucas 1993; Trueba, Jacobs, and Kirton 1990; Welartna 1993). Thus, in addition to linguistic and educational barriers to parent involvement in children's schooling, Lao and Khmer parents may feel that schools have both the right and the responsibility for children's education.

A number of educators and researchers have attempted to address the issue of lack of parental involvement in children's schooling. These initiatives have issued mainly from children's schools and adult education programs designed for parents. Hughes' (1993) review of childhood intervention programs indicates a prevailing attitude which assumes the deficiency of language minority parents and attempts to guide parents toward "middle-class Anglo-American" cultural parenting values. Auerbach (1990) similarly asserts that the prevailing model for family literacy programs is one of transmission which conceptualizes language minority parents as "literacy impoverished" and attempts to provide remedial support to language minority families in the form of school-like activities which parents can do with their children at home. She indicates that this method is inadequate and that family literacy programs must explore what literacy practices are naturally occurring in a home context. Epstein's (1986) survey of teachers' methods of including parents in school activities corroborates Auerbach's work. She indicates that parents reading to children is the most common technique teachers recommend for involving parents in children's schoolwork. Other activities were judged to be less "effective". Clearly, these activities are impossible for parents who do not have highly developed literacy levels in English.

Delgado-Gaitan (1994) asserts that academic research often limits its exploration of parental involvement strategies to mainstream cultural practices such as attendance at special school events. Her work illustrates the importance of exploring the cultural practices which language minority

parents employ to teach and guide their children through the U.S. school system. She perceives *consejos* or cultural narratives as a valuable way in which one Mexican immigrant mother participates in and encourages her children's school achievement despite lack of familiarity with U.S. schools. Delgado-Gaitan's research illustrates the importance of identifying and encouraging a range of culturally appropriate parental involvement strategies.

A growing collection of resource materials and curricula has begun to respond to this challenge through approaching parental involvement from a participatory approach. This approach highlights parents' strengths and encourages groups of parents to work together to locate culturally appropriate and feasible solutions to the issues which they identify as most important to their children's education. (Wallerstein 1983; Auerbach 1990; Nash et.al.1989; Refugee Women's Alliance 1992; Pecoraro and Phommasouvanh 1991).

In order for educators to promote effective parental involvement in the Southeast Asian community, there is a need to document the issues and problems parents perceive in their children's education and their responses to these problems. Much educational research in Southeast Asian communities has focused on children's achievement, while examining parents' attitudes and involvement as a minor factor of influence. Some researchers (Weinstein-Shr 1994; Smith-Hefner 1990) have adopted a more holistic approach, viewing literacy and educational achievement within the larger realm of the family and its pattern of acculturation. This paper continues in this latter tradition, attempting to provide a rich description of the family issues in the acculturation process in order to inform educators.

This paper documents participatory research with a group of Southeast Asian refugee parents who share concerns about their children's education and examines the changes in parents' relationship with their children throughout the process of acculturation, focusing on the strategies these parents use to guide and help their children in school despite linguistic and cultural barriers. Also, it examines how an ESL class in which family and education were central topics of discussion functioned to empower parents and to provide them with a range of involvement strategies. This work has important implications both for K-12 teachers concerned about involving Southeast Asian parents' in their children's schooling, as well as adult educators and family literacy practitioners concerned with understanding parents' cultural attitudes toward parenting and education in order to use these as topics of discussion in the classroom.

Methodology

The setting for this research is an ESL class funded through the Southeast Asian Action Council (SAAC), an umbrella organization representing five Mutual Assistance Associations serving the Cambodian, Ethnic Chi-

nese, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese communities in Philadelphia. The class is taught by one native English speaking teacher and one Japanese/English bilingual teacher. The class meets five days a week at a location convenient to the Southeast Asian community in West Philadelphia. The teachers employ a student-centered, communicatively oriented approach in which the family is one the broad themes used as a topic for classroom discussion, reading, and writing.

All of the students are parents, most have school-age children, and many have expressed concern about their children's behavior and achievement in school. I was alerted to the importance of family issues when I began research in this classroom in September 1994. In an initial assessment interview, a Lao woman who had attended class for two years expressed great concern about her 15 year old son who had been arrested for using a weapon in a fight. She and other students often expressed their concerns about not being able to "control" their children in this new culture.

Although my weekly observations of this class began in the Fall of 1994, the focus of this paper is my research with this group during a four-month period from January through April of 1995. During this time I facilitated a Family-School Discussion Group which met for an hour each week. Employing a participatory approach, this group was designed to discuss issues of concern to students regarding parenting and their children's education. Some of the discussion topics included: differences in parenting practices in U.S. and native country; how children demonstrate respect in the different cultures; and issues involved with helping children with homework.

The participants included the eleven students registered for this class. All students are refugees, representing a variety of cultural backgrounds. Two students are ethnic Chinese from Cambodia, one is Lao, one is Vietnamese, and the remaining seven students are Cambodian. Three participants are men; eight are women. Students have lived in the U.S. anywhere from one to ten years, which places all students within the third wave of Southeast Asian refugees. Many students are on welfare and occasionally work under the table when they need to supplement their incomes. The participants' age range is from late 20s to mid 50s. Like many adult ESL classes, attendance in this class ranged from highly regular to infrequent, as influenced by work, family obligations, and illness. This research focuses on the six women who attended class most frequently and, thus, contributed the most information about family and educational issues in their families and communities. The English proficiency of this group ranges from beginning to low-intermediate and students' listening and speaking ability is generally more advanced than their literacy skills. Educational background in their native country is varied. Students' native literacy levels vary widely; while some students cannot decode in L1, others can read and write letters. Many students attended school in their home country from three to six years; some were unable to attend school in their

native countries because schooling was disrupted due to the war and ensuing political changes or because their families needed their help at home.

Data were collected through participant observation when I was facilitating the Family-School Discussion Group and non-participant observation when the classroom teacher was conducting class. My weekly interaction with this group as a facilitator allowed students to become familiar with me and to situate me in a culturally appropriate role of teacher, rather than the unfamiliar role of researcher. Also, my participation with the class as tutor and observer in the previous semester facilitated the group's knowledge of and comfort with me, allowing students to broach family issues which are topics of great personal significance. During my observation sessions, I took detailed field notes. I chose not to record sessions, because I felt this would inhibit participants' free discussion of sensitive topics. When time did not allow me to record an interaction in sufficient detail, I supplemented my notes by recall after the class session. When I was facilitating the class session, the classroom teacher, experienced in classroom research methods, took notes on the interaction. Again, I supplemented these notes by recalling additional issues immediately after each session. These data were supplemented by informal interviews with the two classroom teachers, individual interviews with five of the six participants who most frequently attended the discussion groups, participants' dialogue journals and other writings, an interview with the director of SAAC, and interviews with the Cambodian and Lao counseling assistants at a neighborhood school which many of the students' children attend.

Findings and Discussion

Weinstein-Shr (1994) examines power as one of the central issues for Khmer parents in their changing role in the U.S. Power and ability to control one's children is a recurring theme throughout all aspects of these data, as well. I examine how power is deeply related to changes occurring with refugee families and to parents' changing role within their families, as well as to their connection with children's schooling. These data illustrate the ways in which parents' authority is at issue in both positions, as well as the different strategies they use to regain authority as both parent and as educator. To explore the changes occurring in the SAAC families, I will discuss the cultural differences between U.S. and the native country, focusing on educational and familial issues; the changes families experience during acculturation; and parents' strategies for helping their children in school. Finally, I will examine the ways in which the ESL class functioned to empower parents in their roles of parent and educator.

Comparing Contexts: U.S. and Native Country

Before examining the specifics of how Lao and Cambodian families change through the process of acculturation, it's important to understand how these cultures and societies differ, particularly in their perception of education and the family. For example, parents spoke of a very different sense of community in the U.S. and native country. In an interview with Mrs. K., a Cambodian counseling assistant at a local elementary school, she noted that Cambodian communities demonstrated a more collective responsibility for children which she felt was influential in children's behavior:

> In my country, if you do something wrong, the whole community are watching you. And they gonna say something, they gonna pass word from one to another, but I don't think that's true here. (Mrs. K., 4/20/95)

Ms. C., the Lao counseling assistant, and Mrs. K. also spoke of the great differences between American and Cambodian and Lao schools. Like all the parents I spoke with, they mentioned that schools in their native countries were far stricter than in the U.S. and that corporal punishment was used to enforce school policy. The domain of school's discipline also extended beyond strictly academic matters. For example, Ms. C. recalls that teachers commonly checked that students' fingernails were not too long. Mrs. K. commented that Cambodian parents' relationship and expectation of school teachers differs greatly from the expectations of American parents. In Cambodia, parents rarely if ever see teachers because of great physical distance between home and school and the lack of telephones; Thus, they do not consult with teachers on educational matters. She said:

> In my country, most parents depend on send the school and depend totally on teachers. Teacher have to take care everything, discipline, everything. In here, we have to say, half and half. You cannot put everything in school. That's a problem. (Mrs. K, 4/20/95)

In seeming agreement with Mrs. K's point, a number of mothers mentioned that they told their children they should listen to the teacher as if she were their mother. Thus, although there is less communication between parents and schools in Cambodia and Laos, schools fulfilled some of the functions of discipline which families traditionally do.

Unlike the U.S. system, children in Laos and Cambodia are not required to attend school. In fact, children of poor families are often unable to attend school because they are needed to work the farm. School attendance, even at elementary school level, seems to be a status symbol; many parents remembered with pride the school uniforms they wore. One woman remarked that wearing the uniform, "you looked beautiful, different from people who don't go to school (B. 4/21/95)."

Literacy and education mean very different things for parents in their home countries and in the U.S. This difference is associated with a change from a rural to an urban environment and the changing social context of literacy for these families in the U.S. and in their home countries. Most parents understand literacy in the U.S. to have much greater significance in their children's present context than in their own context learning literacy in their home countries. In a discussion about the importance of education for children, one parent remarked on the different need for literacy in Cambodia when she was a child and her son's need for literacy in the U.S.:

> Me very old. A long time (ago), no problem. Son no old, many problem. No understand English, no job. In United States, no farmer — paper, pencil. My son talk back to me. I say you listen to me. Think again, everyday every year. In Cambodia no study, no problem. (O. 2/17/95)

The change of environment from a rural, farm-based economy in Cambodia to an urban economy in Philadelphia has changed the need for education, or as O. says, "paper and pencil". Thus, parents' attitude towards children's acquisition of literacy is changed, as well.

A discussion of changing context of family and education cannot be complete without referencing the severe disruption the war caused to this group's families and to their education. This cohort of parents were young children during the Vietnam War and the Pol Pot era and many spoke of the deaths of family members and of having witnessed brutal mass murders. The ability of these survivors to recover from this tragedy is nothing if not remarkable. In exploring the effect of this tragedy on family's acculturation process, one cannot ignore the role of the U.S. in the war. B. said that during the peak of the war, she and her family hid day and night in holes in the ground to escape the bombing. When she spoke of the terror of hearing the planes come, I remarked on the fact that it was American planes doing the bombing. Agreeing with me, she spoke of her anger at finding a book in the library that denied that bombing was occurring in Laos during this time. When I asked how she felt about coming to the U.S. after this, she replied:

B: I thought American is very bad country. Why America destroys my country? And my relative die, whole family with the bomb, the big bomb, right? Bomb the whole family dies, six people, seven people, no, gone, nothing, just like big hole and didn't see anybody. My relatives, aunt, uncle.

D: How old were you then?

B: 5, 6 years old.

D: So how did you feel about coming to the United States? B: I came here I think "I have to grow my childrens up, but I will live on welfare, I don't want to work. (laughs) I want to money from government and support my family, I thought like that. D: Because...

B: Because the government destroy my family. Many people think the same me Vietnamese, you know, Cambodian and Vietnamese. A lot the Vietnamese on welfare. (B., 4/21/95)

Although it's out of the scope of this paper to adequately explore the effect of resistance caused by the war toward U.S. policy and culture, this is clearly a salient, if infrequently discussed, factor to be considered in the adaptation and acculturation of Southeast Asian refugees.

Changes in the Family and influences on Education

In discussing how children and families had changed through acculturation, many parents commented that children did not listen to parents and that they did not take school work seriously. The comments of one parent are indicative of the responses many parents made regarding children in the two cultures:

> In Cambodia the children want to learn, it's not like in here. In Cambodia children want to go to school, but parents no money. The child is listen to mother and father not like in here. In here, when children get to be teenager, they don't want to listen. (C., 4/21/95)

All the parents I spoke with talked of authority problems between parents and teens within the Southeast Asian refugee community, particularly with teenage children. Although many of the parents in this study have younger children and don't have problems with them now, they told stories about relatives or neighbors who could not "control" their children. The problems they discussed included: frequently skipping school, having a boyfriend or girlfriend (a culturally proscribed behavior for Lao and Cambodian teens), gang activity (even among Cambodian and Lao children at the elementary school), dropping out of school, getting in trouble with the law, and running away from home.

In a discussion with Mrs. K. about these problems, she located their source in the acculturation process and the mismatch between U.S. and Cambodian culture:

> The kids they get American culture and at home, most parents they still carry Cambodian culture. And that is the problem. So when the kid was little, it's okay. Parent can control the kid. And when the kid come to school and been in school for a little time, like 4-5 years, they get more American culture. That's a problem. So, when the kid grow up, that's a problem. (Mrs. K., 4/21/95)

She also explained that children's greater knowledge about U.S. culture often allowed them to use this knowledge against parents to evade school activities. In a dramatic example, a Haitian girl in an ESL class planned to skip school through notifying her counselor and teacher that she would no longer be attending school because she and her family were returning to Haiti. Because she had more knowledge about the educational system and greater access to English, she was able to thwart her parents' knowledge of the situation. It wasn't until the ESL teacher called the parents because she was suspicious that the girl's plan was discovered (Personal communication 4/29/95).

In discussions about how their families have changed from their home countries to the U.S., two issues were central to the SAAC parents: how children demonstrate respect for parents and other elders and disciplining children. Participants often raised the topic of children's respect, or lack of respect, for parents through observations about language use. After reading a short play about a child who asked his mother for help on a homework assignment, one parent interpreted the child's questions and behavior as "angry." When I asked why, another participant responded, "In Cambodia, don't say, "You, you." When I again asked why, she responded, " Father have a lot of years. Talk to somebody older than you don't say you, you. Say sister, brother, uncle. Somebody, the same you, younger, say you. Not older." (C., 2/17/24) Thus, it seems to be inappropriate to address an elder by you, because it's viewed as disrespectful. In a later conversation, a both Lao and Cambodian parents mentioned their surprise and discomfort that English doesn't have more than one form of "you" to index varying degrees of respect.

Many parents also mentioned that children no longer greeted parents or elders properly. Both Cambodian and Lao parents discussed the importance of bowing one's head and making oneself lower than an elder; both groups also despaired that their children in the U.S. no longer respected those social norms. During a memorial service I attended at the home of a

Lao participant, all the adults evidenced traditional Lao social norms for this ceremony by taking off their shoes and lowering their heads as they entered the room. When the teenage daughter of one of the participants entered the room to borrow her mother's car keys, she observed neither of these norms, despite the fact that it was a sacred ceremony presided over by Buddhist monks (field notes 4/1/95). None of the adults expressed surprise or shock at her behavior. This incident illustrates the very different social norms of parents and children in this community.

Many parents discussed the differences in discipline practices in the U.S. and in their home countries, attributing children's lack of respect in the U.S. to parents' inability to employ traditional methods of discipline. Parents were well aware of the legal implications of hitting their children in the U.S. and this issue was raised frequently by participants. When the group struggled to define the term "child abuse", one parent put it very succinctly, "Somebody call police, I hit my kids." (L., 2/17/95) In a later conversation about how children demonstrate respect, the following conversation ensued between two Cambodian mothers:

> A.: Children not listen, hit in Cambodia. Here not hit, parents scare go to jailed. children not scared of parents in America. In America, some people are good, some people not good.
>
> M.: In my country, all the children listen to their parents.

A.'s first comment makes clear her perception that roles of parent and child are reversed in the U.S. A. believes that children should be scared of parents because this will make them behave well. However, in the U.S. instead of children fearing their parents, the parents fear the repercussions of hitting their children. M.'s comment illustrates her agreement with A.'s previous statement; when children fear their parents' corporal punishment, it makes them listen to their parents.

Mrs. K. concurred that corporal punishment is more routine in Cambodia and that parents often have difficulty finding other ways to punish children because "they only know one way" (Personal communication, 4/21/95). Children are well aware of the rules against physical abuse in the U.S. and the general mores against physical punishment in mainstream U.S. society. Mrs. K. mentioned the problems this clash of cultures can cause in the school, describing the way children can utilize this knowledge:

> The kid they understand that parent cannot hit the kid. So they understand the rule. When some parent hit the kid, they come to school report to the teacher. The teacher have to sent the nurse. The nurse have to report to DHS. The parents, they don't know what to do. They only know one way. (Mrs. K. 4/20/95)

--Mrs. K. did not clarify the extent of the physical punishment in these cases. Clearly, if situations of physical abuse are occurring, the school and social workers have the responsibility to investigate these cases. The point, here, however, is the cultural clash between methods of parenting and the problems it raises for parents. If Cambodian parents believe that physical punishment highlights their authority as parents and teaches their children to respect that authority, as M. and A. above clearly do, the American cultural framework in which children can report parents for this practice seems strange indeed to these parents. For them, it represents another example of the reversal of roles and the withering authority they can exercise over their children.

B.'s attempt to employ more 'American' style discipline provides an example of the ways in which changing parenting styles can be problematic. T., the ESL class teacher, mentioned that B. frequently asked her questions about how American parents disciplined their children. B. often remarked that when she scolded or punished her children, they thwart her authority, telling her, "This is America. This is freedom. I don't have to do that" (Personal communication, 4/19/95). In an attempt to provide B. with information about discipline practices American parents use, T. gave her a copy of *Angry Feelings* , a book designed to be easily read by ESL or literacy students. From the description on the back cover, this book "explores such issues as building children's self-esteem, coping with stress and anger, and improving family communication" (Feagin 1990).

B. writes in her dialogue journal about the book:

> Angry Feelings - That is my favourite book because I learning how to keep self-control and what I should do to my children in the future. In the past my children did something wrong or they break something I always scream at the children or yelled at them. I did not have self-control. Now I know I am not good enough mother. Because I never read any book fore concerning about raising children. (Dialogue journal from 12/4/94)

Although T.'s intention was not to denigrate B.'s parenting practices, B. seems to have learned from the book that she is not a "good enough mother." T. notes that B. has attempted to radically change her method of discipline after reading the book, remarking, "*Angry Feelings* has become her Bible. She relies on it heavily and uses the information (which is only one kind of situation) as a way, literally, a path to follow in raising kids"

(Personal Communication, 4/19/95). T. remarks that when B.'s 7th grade son skipped school two days in a row, she didn't reprimand him initially because she was too angry. The following morning, she calmly discussed the situation with him, without giving him any punishment.

Strategies Parents used for Education/Discipline

In the wake of the educational and behavioral problems parents faced with their children, parents evidenced empathy, as well as frustration, with their vicious cycle of problems some of the children experienced in school. One parent said, "I think, 'They go to school. They don't understand. They feel bad, don't want to go to school. They have embarrassed for somebody inside the class." (L., 2/17/95) Another parent spoke of her teenage son's habit of skipping school, "Sometime he go to school if he want to go. Sometime he skip school or go late 9:00. He go to school only 2 or 3 times. I think he drop out of school. I talk a lot. I say, 'It's your future.' Why does U. do that? I think he feel embarrassed. He doesn't understand at all" (B., 2/17/95). Parents expressed concern about how to help children with their difficult schoolwork, when their children's English literacy was often well beyond their own and when they often had great difficulty communicating with their children's teachers.

B., the parent in this group who was most proficient in English literacy, was able to read with and to her younger children. She wrote about reading with her 9 year old son a book about Southeast Asian refugees which she had gotten from her ESL class; she felt it was important for him to know about Laotian history and to improve his reading.

> The New Arrival. This book very interesting for me and my son P., because they talk about my country in the past that made remine me too remember about my life in the past. When we read this book together my son H. has a lot of question too me especially a Dark night (part 6). He asked me what happen in the dark night? I say everybody they are come from Laos to Thailand. they're across the Mekhong river at the darknight because they're don't want to kill with soldiers. They are many people diet (died) at Mekhong River because its fast and wide. (B.'s dialogue journal — 2/6/1995)

Most parents did not have the proficiency in English literacy to be able to do this, however. B. mentioned that with her older children, she had a different strategy to ensure homework was completed, "I ask my son. How many homework — 2 or 3? I check to see if he do homework. I count." (B. 2/17/95) Other parents reported pairing their older children or relatives to help younger children complete their homework assignments.

Another participant mentioned that her husband tries to help their children with homework:

> Sometime my husband take my kids go to library.... My husband he don't read, he don't write, but my daughter a lot homework. Sometime my husband look homework, he don't know. Too hard. (S., 2/17/95)

Later, S. mentioned that her husband talked to school officials to secure a tutor for their daughter, "Sometime my husband take my kid go to library. But right now my husband call to teacher, my husband go to school my kid. My husband go to office, say to boss, my husband say want tutor help my kid." (S., 2/17/95) Other parents reported that their children went to community after-school programs, but many complained that there were too few tutors to help the children and that the atmosphere was often too noisy for children to complete their assignments.

In addition to ensuring that homework was completed, parents used a number of strategies to encourage their children's achievement in school. Similar to the mother in Delgado-Gaitan's study who uses *consejos* to guide and instruct her children, many parents mentioned talking to their children about the importance of doing well in school. When I asked one parent to tell me what she told her children about school, she replied:

> I say, "All children go to school. You study hard. You study very good English. You study good job. You have to go to work. You have make money a lot. You go to buy your house and buy cars. You drive the car by yourself." I say that, "You don't go to the place around on the sidewalk." I say that, but I don't know she (long pause). I forgot English word, but I say Cambodian to my children.... I say that everyday. When my children come back home, I say when they eat lunch, finish they do that homework.... But I don't know how to speak and how to understand in English all. But my children learning a lot of word than me and I don't understand." (L., 4/24/95)

This parent clearly views success in school as key to economic self-sufficiency and stresses to children both the financial rewards of doing well in school, as well as the hazards they must avoid, "the place around on the sidewalk", in order to succeed.

A few parents discussed their developing English proficiency as important in assisting them to monitor their children's progress and behavior in school. Two mothers reported contacting their children's teachers for the first time. One mother said:

> I am afraid to son skip school. When I tell to my son K., today you have the homework, K. said I have the homework but I do that at school. I think K. lies me. But I call to K. teacher. (O., 2/10/95)

Often the threat of calling the teacher is a hollow one, for both children and parents know that making contact in English is very difficult. Being able to contact the teacher in this instance indicates an important source of control and power for this parent, as she is finally able to determine whether her son is telling the truth.

Despite parents' difficulty in contacting teachers or other school officials, the teacher told me of a remarkable series of events in which L. had advocated for her children on a number of occasions (personal communication 4/29/95). In the first instance, L's son was being beaten up on the way to the annex classrooms in which the ESL classes were housed. L., concerned about her son's welfare, got him transferred to the main school building for ESL class. Later in the year, concerned about her son's skipping school, L. called the teacher and talked with her in English about this concern, as well as her concern that her son was missing three periods of mainstream instruction while in ESL class. In another incident, L. had a problem with her 2nd grade daughter who does not attend the neighborhood school, and is bussed to another location. When L. was called to pick her daughter up from school, she could not because she doesn't have a car and wasn't sure where the school was located. Concerned about this situation, L. contacted school officials and had her daughter transferred to the neighborhood school. These examples indicate the perseverance of this parent and her knowledge of the school system, as well as the importance of bilingual counseling assistants who were able to help this parent negotiate the school system to advocate for her children.

Perhaps the most dramatic strategy used by parents to enable their children to succeed is the increasingly common habit of sending adolescents out of the city to live with relatives if the teens are displaying discipline problems. Mrs. K. reported: "Many parents send their kids out of the city to relatives out of the city. With the Cambodian parents, there's about ten parents this year" (4/21/95). Out of a population of "a little over 100 Cambodian students" (from counselor's estimate), this represents about 10% of children who have been sent away to live with relatives. The counselors both mentioned recommending this to parents when they encountered discipline problems, and in fact when B.'s son began to skip school and she asked the counselor for advice, she recommended either moving or sending the son out of the city. Although B. thought this was an unfeasible and rather dramatic solution, she herself has considered sending her sons to live with her parents in Laos.

Ramifications of the ESL class on Parents' Empowerment

This class functioned in various ways to empower parents, providing them with information about American culture and schools, and various resources and strategies to use in helping their children. Parents discussed issues and problems regarding parenting and education during the class, sharing information about options and resources such as the location of the local library and the availability and effectiveness of tutoring/homework programs. The increasing literacy and English proficiency of parents also seemed to aid their involvement with their children's education in many ways. Some parents were able to help their children with homework or read with them and a number of parents noted that children helped them with their homework or reading tasks. These interactions around literacy provided a resource to both parties, as well as a point of contact for parents and children who seemed to be located in two divergent cultures. Parents' greater proficiency with English also helped them to interact with officials at their children's school, enabling them to communicate directly with school officials to obtain accurate information about their children's progress.

Parent's participation in the ESL class also provided them with an opportunity to ask questions of the teachers about American traditions and behaviors which they did not understand. B. wrote in her dialogue journal about concerns she had about her teenage son:

> Last weekend I saw alot the boys and girls came to he room and they do still went to party at the school. in my country the girls never come to boy or men's room.

> T., can you explain to me in American ways why the teacher make party for the students? Why the girls come to boy's house? How are they doing in American traditional? Please answer my question. Sincerely, B. (Dialogue Journal 3/28/94)

B. uses this entry in her dialogue journal to inquire about her sons' behavior and the role of the school. Although B. is clear that in her culture this behavior is inappropriate, she asks T. about "American ways" in an effort to judge whether this behavior is similarly inappropriate by American parenting standards. In this way the teacher can act as a cultural resource, allowing B. greater access to information about American culture. This information is particularly important, as children often used their greater knowledge of American culture in order to thwart parents' authority.

In an activity designed to have the SAAC parents ask questions of other U.S. parents, the teacher initiated a project in which the SAAC class collectively wrote a letter to a native English speaking adult literacy class. Students were asked to brainstorm questions they might like to ask the American students, and groups of students worked to write and revise portions of the letter. Many of the SAAC class' questions for American students revolved around children's behavior and education:

> We have many question to talk to American students.
> 1. How do people in the United States discipline their teenagers when they don't listen to their parents? How do you help your children with their homework when they don't understand? How do you help your children if they drop out of school? How do you take care of teenagers go to school if they don't want to studies and often go outside at night?" (Final draft of letter - 2/22/95)

This activity represents a way in which this class used students' developing literacy skills to interact with other parents and to gain greater access and information about American parenting and educational practices.

Conclusion

These data demonstrate that within U.S. culture the SAAC parents experienced difficulty asserting their authority and power over children in many ways. Children were often able to exploit their greater knowledge of U.S. culture in order to thwart their parents' authority. Many parents felt that their authority was severely damaged through not being able to physically punish their children. The different framework of respect in the parent-child relationship in the U.S. also was perceived by parents to accord them less authority. Parents experienced difficulty with the schools, both in communicating with school officials, which was hampered by both linguistic and cultural barriers, and in parents' inability to assist children in their education through practices like helping them with their homework and reading.

Despite these problems, parents evidenced a variety of ways to participate in their children's education: through finding other individuals or groups to help their children with schoolwork; advising and guiding children; advocating for their children with the school; and by sending adolescents to live with relatives if parents felt they could not mediate their discipline problems.

The parents' ESL class provided an avenue for parents to discuss and locate solutions for the difficulties of parenting in U.S. culture. The class

provided a forum for participants to share problems and resources; to increase English proficiency, enhancing the connection between them and their children and their ability to communicate directly with school officials; and to use teachers as a cultural resource in understanding and navigating children through this new culture.

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